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FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0524
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0116
INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0027
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0545

S E C R E T BASRAH 000025

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNOR'S OPPONENT PLANS STREET ACTION

REF: A) Basrah 024 B) Basrah 023

CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, Basrah Regional Embassy
Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) The head of Thar Allah in Basrah, Sayid Yusif al-Batat, met with the director of the Regional Embassy Office (REO) on April 9 and informed him that thousands of people are planning to take to the streets of Basrah on April 16 in a bid to oust Governor Mohammed al-Wa'eli from office. Sayid Yusif, a sworn enemy of the governor, said the demonstrators plan to set up an encampment outside the governor's office with follow on plans to launch a civil strike. He hinted that if this does not work, they would resort to violent means to achieve their objective. Sayid Yusuf refused to say who he supports to replace al-Wa'eli, but his close friend, Defense Ministry advisor Majid al-Sari, who accompanied Yusif, suggested "Sayid Hashem" as a possible replacement. Al-Sari gave no further details.

¶2. (C) Thar Allah, which means vengeance of God, is an Iranian-backed political organization/militia, with limited popular support, that seeks to impose an Iranian-style theocracy. Sayed Yusif told the REO director that it is useless for the Coalition to try to promote democracy and stability by engaging with the elected officials of Basrah. (Note: Sayid Yusif is a member of the Basrah Provincial Council, but he boycotts the council meetings. End note.) He asserted that a large portion of the billions of dollars that the United States and Coalition partners have spent in southeastern Iraq on reconstruction have ended up in the pockets of politicians. In addition to enriching crooks, the Thar Allah leader said, the corruption has alienated the Basrah public from the Coalition. He said, in contrast, Iran has been more effective in generating goodwill by meeting with the public and donating funds directly to universities, hospitals and other civic institutions in Basrah. He urged the Coalition to do likewise. (Note: The high security threat makes it is extremely difficult for REO staff to conduct meetings in Basrah. (See ref. A.) End note.)

¶3. (C) Sayed Yusif encouraged the director to meet with Iranian officials to discuss security in Basrah. At Majid al-Sari's suggestion, he offered to set up a luncheon meeting between the REO director and the Iranian consul general in Basrah. The director said that U.S. policy prevents him from speaking directly with Iranian officials, but he suggested that Sayid Yusif convey the message to the Iranian CG that the United States is on a mission of peace in Basrah. The director added that Iran's recent abduction British sailors has dimmed Iran's credibility as a serious partner for international dialogue.

¶4. (S/NF) Comment. It is difficult to gauge Sayid Yusif's credibility or the extent of his influence, but his report of a

possible coup attempt is consistent with other reports that rival militias are plotting against the Governor and his Fadillah militia. (See reftel.) If true, this is just another dark omen that Basrah may be descending into civil war as local groups vie for power to fill the vacuum created by the reposturing of the British forces. It is also noteworthy that Majid al-Sari, a vocal opponent of Iranian influence in the region, has such close ties with an Iranian proxy. Perhaps this just reinforces the cliché that all politics are local. End comment.

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